

# The Ballarat Naturalist

August 2016



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## **Favourite moments in the field** *Club members' images & stories*

Indra Bone showed a selection of his favourite bird photographs that he took over the last few months from the Ballarat region, Werribee Treatment Plant, and his recent foray in the Little Desert National Park. Here are two of the photos - a Purple-gaped Honeyeater, taken at Little Desert National Park, and a Freckled Duck at Lake Wendouree.



Carol Hall's love of Arctic landscapes took her to Iceland and Norway earlier this year to experience and photograph these regions in winter, having already seen them in summer back in 2010. She was particularly interested in the spreading zone between the Eurasian and North



American tectonic plates at Thingvellir in Iceland, where considerable geothermal, seismic and volcanic activity occurs. Such activity interacts with the four major areas of permanent ice. She was also attracted by the historical significance of the Thingvellir region

where Iceland's first Parliament was held in 930 AD following Viking settlement.

Carol showed images of the 7 km-wide spreading zone and associated features, such as fault scarps and fissures complete with frozen waterfalls. Nearby the geysir called Strokkur was active. Moving further east to the edge of the Vatnajokull ice cap, her group investigated an ice cave, with beautiful blue ice streaked with layers of volcanic ash. She then went on to Jokulsarlon, the lagoon where small icebergs calve from the Vatnajokull ice cap, flow along a short channel to the ocean and wash up on the basalt beach, creating fantastic shapes backlit by a fitful sun. Returning to this locality late at night, she photographed the aurora borealis spanning the entire lagoon. In Norway, she captured the flowing ribbons of the bright green aurora, illustrated in a timelapse sequence.



“ John Gregurke said: My favourite field experiences have been enhanced by the willingness of many field nats to freely share their knowledge.

I have learnt a great deal from many people in the Club.

- If I wanted to learn the identification of plants, the people to stay near were Pat Murphy and Helen Burgess.
- When birds were calling, Greg Binns was able to identify them, often before they were visible.
- While working on the “Wattles of Ballarat” book, Bill Murphy and Carol Hall shared their knowledge of where to find wattles and how to get the best photographs.

- Emily Noble is now the go-to person for all things orchid.
- Les Hanrahan willingly identifies fungi during all our excursions.
- During the last couple of weeks I have been working on the Enfield plant list., and sent a draft to Roger Thomas. I soon received a list of the plants that now have new botanical names, and he also spotted a few spelling mistakes.

This cooperative and sharing nature of the people mentioned earlier is characteristic of so many field nats, which makes all excursions enjoyable learning experiences.

Val Hocking recently visited O'Reilly's at Mt Lamington National Park Qld, and enjoyed walking among the tall buttressed Booyong trees and the Strangler Figs of the rainforest. The bird life was also a highlight, particularly to see and hear a male and female Albert's Lyrebird.



Early morning bird walks (with a little enticing) also included close up views of the brilliant Regent bowerbirds who had recently returned, Satin Bowerbirds and whipbirds. Val shared with members accounts from John Gould and Charles Coxen, comparing the two bowerbirds and their habits in 1864. At that time, the satin one collected blue feathers, shells and other natural items from the “natives camps” instead of the blue plastic it now prefers.

Steve Sorrell reported seeing Red-tailed Black Cockatoos 25 to 30 years ago in the forests east/north-east of Melbourne, such as Woods Point/ Walhalla and Healesville.

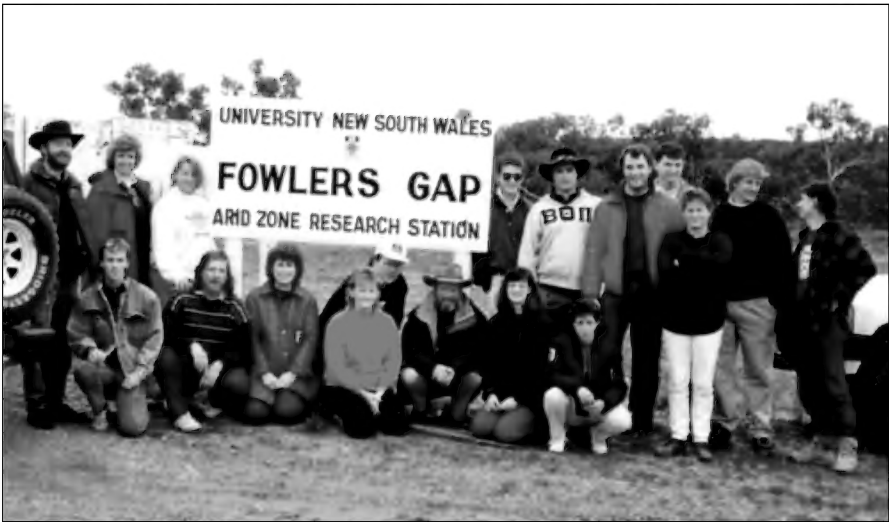
He also shared this beautiful example of copper in basalt.



Peter and Claire Dalman visited Ireland in 2015 and prepared a presentation of pictures taken in the Burren on the west coast of County Clare. The rocky limestone landscape was formed by glaciation about 10,000 years ago. The warm Gulf Stream current moderates the otherwise cold climate. Tucked away in nooks and crannies are a diversity of alpine, Mediterranean, coastal and inland plants.



“ Bill Elder’s story: Taking part in an employer-sponsored Earthwatch expedition to outback NSW was a life-changing experience for me. I was working for ANZ bank in Melbourne and put my name forward to go on what seemed like an all-expenses paid ‘holiday’ for 2 weeks in mid-1990. The project was about rangelands management, and sought to measure the degree of competition between sheep and kangaroos in far western NSW. It attracted people from all over the world. The site was the UNSW research station at Fowlers Gap, about 100 kms north of Broken Hill.



“Where’s Bill?”



This was my first time in the outback and the views from most vantage points were nothing less than spectacular. The photo to the right is of “K1” – a 10 metre high tower in a 100 hectare paddock; this was to be home for a 6 hour shift a couple of times each week. Great views during the day, but freezing during the nights in July. There was a gas heater, but it tended to heat the back of your head and that was all. Like *Lord of the Rings*, there were two towers, 3 km apart, from where we monitored groups of selected animals as they moved around the paddock. This was a 24-hour operation Mon to Fri.



The view inside K11 includes radio equipment and wheel to turn the antenna. Operators had a sheet with the radio frequencies of selected sheep and kangaroos for the session, and we had 15 minutes to locate their signals and record the location/bearing. We



We regularly checked with the other tower and chatted to fellow volunteers. At night we had a billion stars to look at. This fairly tedious data collection was one of the most valuable contributions made by Earthwatch volunteers.

So how did sheep and kangaroos get radio frequencies that could be tracked out in the rangeland? That’s where the fun begins.

The sheep would be yarded in the normal fashion, but getting a radio collar on a Red kangaroo is a different matter. Fortunately, the researchers had devised a humane and basically fun way to capture



the roos and place collars on them. Called “stunning” the process involves shooting a .22 bullet past the head of a kangaroo, the sound of which stuns it momentarily, giving the feckless volunteers the chance to run across the uneven ground and literally jump on the roo. We managed to catch maybe 1 in 3 most nights. Spotlights are used to find the roos and make a selection, then the stunning crew of maybe 8 or 10 quietly dismount from the back of their ute and creep around the arc of the light to get as close as possible. They wait until they hear the crack of the rifle – expertly wielded by head researcher David – then everyone runs as fast as they can and attempts to land the roo without getting injured by flailing legs, tails and teeth.



Stunning crew rugged up to brave a freezing night of roo wrestling, note David with rifle and scope

Sometimes, the rocky ground and clumpy grasses hindered progress extremely well, and the best moments were seeing someone hit the deck just as the spotlight lit them up 2 metres from Skippy. Pictured are three volunteers holding down a small female while they record measurements. The radio collar is then fitted and the roo released. The whole process took a few minutes.



In conclusion, the entire two weeks is fondly remembered because it inspired my interest in Australian birds, and then in all things related to nature, conservation and environment. A bare two years later, I gave up my ANZ job and went to Longerenong College where I met John Petheram who encouraged me in my studies in agriculture, and also in natural resources management more broadly. Earthwatch Kangaroo ‘90 was uncomfortable, exciting, an opportunity to learn, and a long way from home, but it also changed my life.

## A Trip Through La Gerche Country

Leader – John Petheram

We started at old Ballarat Cemetery, looking for the graves of John La Gerche (1845-1914), and his wife Elizabeth who survived John by 30 years. A wreath of cones of 6 pine species from La Gerche Gully was placed on the graves, to commemorate La Gerche's outstanding efforts in restoring the Ballarat-Creswick Forest from the ravages of mining, and his other work from Creswick.

Our next stop was the corner of White Swan Rd and Alkera Rd in Invermay, at the site of the Prospector's Arms Hotel from the late 1850s -1890s. Here French Capt Fleischhauer established



a large vineyard and winery and later opened the pub to quench the thirst of hundreds of miners working Dead Horse and Frenchman's gullies in the early-mid 1850s. Alkera Rd was then the main road to Creswick, and Frenchman's gully and California Ck ran to Lake Burrumbeet and the Hopkins River catchment. A fascinating book "Dead Horse to Dancing" by Pam Tooms and Di Campbell covers much of the history of this Dead Horse area, which was retitled 'Invermay' in 1873 by Swinglers, so as to better sell their land as real estate.

Turning left at 5-ways Junction, we followed James Hill Rd along the Great Divide – with White Swan Reservoir in Moorabool catchment to the east. To the north, waters drain via Creswick Creek, Tullaroop Creek and Loddon River to the Murray. We took a walk east from Shuttleworth Rd to look at an area where Southern Bluegum and Silvertop Ash (*Eucalyptus sieberi*) have established in otherwise natural forest near the Divide. These are said to



Local Eucalypt species mixed with scattered Bluegums and Silvertop Ash

be from plantings by early foresters. Silvertop Ash has dark fissured bark on the trunk with smooth, white upper branches.

John La Gerche patrolled all this area on horseback from Creswick in 1882-97, and gained special permission from Melbourne to stay some nights at White Swan Hotel in Springs, so as to be there in time to catch early-morning timber cutters. Springs was submerged when the White Swan dam was built in 1951. When La Gerche started as a Crown Land Bailiff in 1882, virtually no trees existed, and his task was to stop people cutting new growth, limit firewood removal, and check livestock grazing. He spent 2 days per week in Ballarat courts prosecuting offenders, and 4 days in the forests. His detailed diaries are summarised in a marvellous book by Angela Taylor called “A Forester’s Log”.

Travelling north, we passed Cypress trees marking the old Shuttleworth home and workers camp for White Swan Res., then crossed the GD Trail and Wolfe Rd near old Wolfes Hotel. Then north of Slaty Ck Rd, we visited an area of Chinese gardens, with remnant beds, races and dams, disappearing steadily due to damage from modern gold prospecting. A second garden area visited on the eastern bank of Mopoke Ck was in an area intensively mined by ‘Manila People’ – Chinese/Philippine people who arrived via California. These garden beds are distinctly long and raised. We witnessed two metal detector users who had nearly destroyed one of these historic beds with a hoe. Protecting such heritage is very difficult. History of this area is outlined in booklets and maps by David Henderson of Creswick. Les showed us several impressive fungi in this area.



Raised garden beds



Damage by prospectors



We lunched near a crowd at Slaty Ck Campsite 1 and then visited an abandoned sluice-box (pictured) just off Petticoat Rd. Then east along Slaty Ck Rd past the sites of 2 dredge companies, various schools, stores and banks. We looked at the old Selkirk brickworks quarry near the Humbug (deep) Mine



site. Next stop was at the junction off old Creswick-Melbourne Rd and Lincoln Gully Rd, to look at the Chinese mining site with remains of ‘man-powered’ puddling mills. This allowed comparison with a much larger, animal-drawn, puddling mill seen near Eaton’s Dam. This dam was built around 1862 by Eaton brothers et al. to feed races to Lincoln Gully and sell water to hundreds of miners. Eaton’s Dam burst irreparably in about 1933, and is listed by Heritage Victoria.



Remains of horse-drawn puddling mill



Remains of man-powered puddling mill

The final leg was along Jackass Rd to turn left at East-West Highway and cross the Great Dividing Trail (again), near the homestead site of William Spence – a well-known, early Creswick miner, who became a preacher, later helped form the AWU, and became a federal MP after Federation. La Gerche would have known Spence from his records and dealings with all bush residents in the Creswick-Ballarat Forest.

We approached the La Gerche Gully and Trail from the east along Sawpit Road and stopped in the centre of the La Gerche Circuit at the house-site of La Gerche’s plantation manager Mr Wade, then drove home via Creswick.

*Thanks to John Petheram for leading an excursion which showed us many facets of the history of Creswick Forest during the time that John La Gerche was forest bailiff. John G*

*- Article by John Petheram, photos by various club members*

## **Excerpts from FNCB Meeting Minutes July 1, 2016**

**Attendance:** President John Gregurke welcomed 27 members

**Apologies:** F Hanrahan, D & E Thurgood, P & C Dalman, R Winton, M Keatley, D Brooke, E Gregurke, W McGuire, M Thomas, K Elder, E Swan

**Business Arising from Previous Meeting:** Emily lodged the Club's Annual Statement with Consumer Affairs Victoria, and ordered "Moths of Victoria" books as requested. John G is updating the Enfield Forest plant species list.

**Correspondence in:** From Susan Kruss, Fed Uni: abstract from her conference paper; information/ maps about early areas reserved for special management in Enfield Forest/ areas mentioned in Club minutes in the 60s and 70s, and about the "sandy patch". From Linda Wright, Garibaldi Landcare Group: request to use some of Carol's photos off the FNCB website for a reserve interpretative project.

**Correspondence out:** To Club Members: request for any information about an FNCB submission relating to the Land Conservation Council report in the 1980s. To Jenny West, APS Ballarat: Supplied photos of winter-flowering orchids and Correas for their winter plant show's slide-show.

**Reports:** Treasurer's Report: Opening balance \$8,127.13, income \$35, expenses \$113.64, closing balance: \$8,048.49.

Friends of Canadian Corridor meeting, June 16: John G reported that FoCC leaders met with Rod Newnham, Regional Director Parks Victoria. Many issues were discussed, including a management plan being written over the next year, the structure of a management group and how the FoCC see the Park in ten years time. It will be a multi-use park with many different management and activity zones, but conservation of the natural values remains a priority.

### **General Business**

July Club field trip: La Gerche country, led by John P.

July mid-month excursion will be to the area known colloquially by early field nat's as "the sandy patch" in Enfield State Forest/ Park.

Peter N is developing the website of the Ballarat Environment Network. As a part of an application for substantial grant-funding, Peter is inviting FNCB to become a partner in the project. Principally, FNCB would lend its name to the integrity of the project,

and if funding is received, would provide the opportunity for more member involvement in the website's development. Peter outlined some of the many ways FNCB members might benefit from the proposed networking tool: promote the Club, its activities and speakers; find flora and fauna records more easily; access easy-to-use maps; share photos; find out about the activities of other local groups; report things like bird sightings or dumped rubbish to appropriate authorities quickly and easily. John Mildren moved a motion that the FNCB welcomes the project and supports a collaborative partnering with BEN as it develops the "Our Earth Matters" website. Motion seconded and carried.

Sadly, John G reported the passing of Rob Moors, an active field naturalist from Bendigo who was the first treasurer of SEANA, member of the Nature Photography Group and friend to many in the Club. John will send Glenise and her family a condolence card on behalf of the Club.

### **Show and Tell/ Field Reports**

Les H reported a male Flame Robin at Bungaree.

John Morrish delighted in the sighting of an Eastern Spinebill in his garden at Wendouree for the first time in 10 years.

Andy A spotted a Great Egret feeding in the shallows of a waterway adjoining Insignia Blvd, Alfredton.

John Mildren had four sightings of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos in Ballarat Central in June.

Steve S saw eight Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos at Lake Esmond.

Mike S watched two majestic Wedge-tailed Eagles about 150m above the ground being harassed by three magpies between Shelford and Inverleigh. He also reported eight Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos chomping on pine cones in the crown (about 100ft above ground) at Ballarat Golf Course at 9am one morning. Ravens were most annoyed at their presence.

Emily N found her first flowering Veined Helmet-orchid *Corybas diemenicus* for the season at Dereel, along with a few Trim Greenhoods, Striated Greenhoods and Nodding Greenhoods. Tall Greenhoods had full buds and Mayfly Orchids were starting to bud.

Indra B saw four Purple-gaped Honeyeaters in the Little Desert.

# CALENDAR 2016

## August

- Fri 5      *African Wildlife*, Val Hocking, club member  
*Orchids of Enfield State Forest*, Emily Noble,  
club member
- Sun 7      *Exc.: Small "BEN" reserves around Smythesdale*, Emily  
Noble, club member
- Tue 23      No committee meeting scheduled

## September

- Fri 2      *Spotlight on Ballarat remnants*, Elspeth Swan, club  
member
- Sat 3      *Exc.: Clarkesdale Bird Sanctuary*, John Gregurke, club  
member, with GFNC

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*N.B. Fran returns as editor for the next newsletter. Thankyou for everyone's kind comments, and to Emily for proof-reading! - Tammie*

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## Committee

President	John Gregurke	
Vice Pres	Fran Hanrahan	
Secretary	Emily Noble	
Treasurer	Les Hanrahan	Val Hocking
Claire Dalman	John Mildren	
Peter Dalman	Andy Arnold	
Bill Elder		

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**Meetings** are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr of Gillies and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm.

**Excursions:** Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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